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VII. English Language Arts,  
Reading Comprehension, Grade 8

# Grade 8 English Language Arts Reading Comprehension Test

The spring 2007 grade 8 MCAS English Language Arts Reading Comprehension test was based on learning standards in the two content strands of the Massachusetts *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* (2001) listed below. Page numbers for the learning standards appear in parentheses.

- Language (*Framework*, pages 19–26)
- Reading and Literature (*Framework*, pages 35–64)

The *English Language Arts Curriculum Framework* is available on the Department Web site at [www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html).

In *Test Item Analysis Reports* and on the Subject Area Subscore pages of the MCAS *School Reports* and *District Reports*, ELA Reading Comprehension test results are reported under two MCAS reporting categories: **Language** and **Reading and Literature**, which are identical to the two *Framework* content strands listed above.

## Test Sessions and Content Overview

The MCAS grade 8 ELA Reading Comprehension test included three separate test sessions. Each session included selected readings, followed by multiple-choice and open-response questions. Common reading passages and test items are shown on the following pages as they appeared in test booklets. Due to copyright restrictions, certain reading passages cannot be released to the public on the Web site. For further information, contact Student Assessment Services at 781-338-3625.

## Reference Materials and Tools

The use of bilingual word-to-word dictionaries was allowed for current and former limited English proficient students only, during all three ELA Reading Comprehension test sessions. No other reference materials were allowed during any ELA Reading Comprehension test session.

## Cross-Reference Information

The table at the conclusion of this chapter indicates each item's reporting category and the *Framework* general standard it assesses. The correct answers for multiple-choice questions are also displayed in the table.

# English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 1

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains three reading selections with eighteen multiple-choice questions and two open-response questions. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*In A Dog Year, Jon Katz writes about the strong bond that develops between him and his two yellow Labrador retrievers, Julius and Stanley. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

### from A DOG YEAR

by Jon Katz

1 We hardly had a bad moment, the three of us, so neatly did we fit together, interlocking pieces of the puzzle that is the varied partnership between humans and dogs.

2 Julius and Stanley embodied the noblest characteristics of their proud breed. They were handsome, loyal, utterly dependable, and affectionate. Julius came first. My daughter was young, and while there are different viewpoints about this, I personally don't believe there's a more rewarding moment for a parent than handing a happy, squirming, doe-eyed Lab puppy over to a small kid. I carry the look on her face in my memory, and while there are times when I can't remember what day of the week it is, I can always recall the wonder and joy in her eyes as if it had just happened.

3 Although I bought the dog with my daughter in mind, she was soon playing computer games and collecting garish-looking dolls, and I was out in the chill winter mornings cheering and exulting when a puzzled but earnest puppy took a dump outside.

4 Julius became mine, of course, the two of us bonding as if by Crazy Glue.

5 A year later, the breeder called and invited me to take a ride with my daughter to see the new litter. I was just looking, I assured my muttering and incredulous wife, Paula, who'd dragged Julius's old plastic dog crate out of the basement, ready to house its new resident, before I'd left the driveway.

6 My daughter and I returned with tiny, heart-melting Stanley. Julius was initially dubious about this new pest he had to contend with, but within a couple of days the two Labs loved each other as much as I loved them both, and they loved me and my family and, well, everybody who passed by.



7 It was a happy relationship from the first, and it only grew better, more comfortable. Both dogs were housebroken within days, settling happily into hours of rawhide-chewing.

8 Our lifestyles, as they say, meshed perfectly. Neither dog had much interest in running around.

9 Their great genius was doing nothing in particular with great style and dedication. Both disdained traditional canine tasks such as pursuing squirrels or rabbits, digging, or destroying property. Their chosen work was to reflect on the state of the world, lick neighborhood kids, and accompany me through midlife.

10 In the morning, neither dog moved a muscle until I did; then both slithered into bed for a family cuddle. After I was up and dressed, they sat quietly and attentively beneath the kitchen table, staring hypnotically at their food bowls, as if the power of their gazes would conjure up something tasty.

11 After breakfast, the early walk through our pleasant suburban neighborhood was leisurely, Julius and Stanley forensically sniffing along behind. Certain shrubs and rocks were always carefully inspected, each at a quite deliberate pace, the only area in which they would not compromise. Nothing could rush them; they'd go over every millimeter of a sapling's bark, undistractedly, until satisfied. A rabbit could hop right by—and sometimes did—without interrupting them.

12 For a half hour or so, the dogs proceeded at such stately paces and behaved so dependably that I was free to think about the coming day, what I wanted to write, how I wanted to write it. Our walks were tranquil, interrupted only by a stream of friends and admirers, from dog buddies to school-bus drivers.

13 Despite their historic roles as hunting dogs, however, they disdained rain and snow, and in inclement weather mastered a convenient hundred-yard dash to the nearest tree, then turned and hustled back inside.

14 Then it was time for work. I prepared a sandwich for each, taking two big rawhide chews and slathering a layer of peanut butter in between. Julius and Stanley carried the concoctions to the backyard and settled in for a deliberate gnaw, after which they were spent, and needed to refresh themselves with a long rest.

15 If the weather was fine, the dogs would spend much of the morning dozing in the yard. They might rouse themselves to bark at a passing dog. Mostly not.

16 On unpleasant days, they came into my study and offered themselves as footrests, both tucked underneath my desk, one on my left, one on my right.

17 I never had to provide much in the way of instruction. These guys knew how to relax. When the computer chimed as it booted up (I am an unswerving Macintosh man), the dogs dropped to the floor as if they'd been shot. They didn't move until they heard the monitor thunk off, at which point they'd rise (cautiously), ready for another stroll.

18 After a year or so, Julius and Stanley had achieved a Labrador state of grace, the ability to become an organic part of your life rather than an intrusion into it.

19 For a writer, having two such quiet and patient companions is a godsend. They warded off loneliness. They also kept me from a purely sedentary existence. After lunch, we'd rack up another mile or two at our usual unhurried pace.

- 20 Through the day, I supplied rawhide chews, pigs' ears, indeterminable and smelly dried bull parts, and a rain of treats and biscuits. It was ridiculously indulgent, of course, but I could not do enough for these boys, nor they for me. I tried to repay them for their love and unflagging loyalty, even though that was unnecessary and impossible.
- 21 They had their idiosyncracies. Julius was so unconcerned about wildlife (the sort his brethren traditionally retrieved) that he'd been known to nap inches from a rabbit's nest in the garden. And when Stanley wanted to chase a ball—which was much of the time—he would nip me in the butt to get me moving.
- 22 Once in a great while somebody would strew the garbage around the house, in the centuries-old tradition of Labs in Newfoundland who worked with fishermen, loved the cold, wet outdoors, and had to forage for food; they got to be pretty flexible about what they'd put in their stomachs. If I left them alone in the house, they collected odd articles of clothing—my wife's fuzzy bedroom slippers were a favorite—and slept with them.
- 23 It had been years since either dog had been on a leash or given me reason, despite the technicalities of local leash laws, to use one. Every kid in the neighborhood knew them and waved at them from bikes and car windows, through soccer-field fences. For many, they provided the first introduction to dogs, and they set a high standard. Over the years, many people told me that Julius or Stanley had inspired them to go out and get a dog.
- 24 When night fell, so did the Labs, settling on their cedar beds for a final rawhide snack, and descending into a deep, unmoving sleep.
- 25 After some years—Stanley was seven and Julius eight—we moved almost like a school of fish, the three of us veering in one direction, then another. We turned corners at the same time, sat in various parks and yards sharing lunch.
- 26 All the one ever asked was to live, play, and work alongside me. All the other one wanted besides that was the chance to swim in ponds once in a while and chase a ball a few times a day. They got what they wanted. So did I.

From *A DOG YEAR* by Jon Katz, copyright © 2002, 2003 by Jon Katz. Used by permission of Villard Books, a division of Random House, Inc. Photograph by Eric Etheridge.

- 1 Based on paragraphs 3 and 4, what caused the author to bond with Julius?
- A. He bought his daughter another dog.
  - B. His daughter was unhappy with Julius.
  - C. He became the main caregiver to Julius.
  - D. He had more experience with dogs than his wife did.
- 2 In paragraph 5, what does Paula imply by taking the old dog crate from the basement?
- A. The author will argue with her about the dog.
  - B. The author will be unhappy with the new puppy.
  - C. The author will not be able to handle two dogs.
  - D. The author will not be able to resist buying a new puppy.
- 3 What do paragraphs 19 and 20 **mainly** describe?
- A. what a writer's life is like
  - B. what the dogs ate for snacks
  - C. how different the dogs' personalities were
  - D. how the author benefited from the relationship
- 4 Paragraphs 21 and 22 describe the dogs' "idiosyncrasies." Which of the following best defines an *idiosyncrasy*?
- A. a household chore
  - B. a dangerous activity
  - C. a physical trait of a dog breed
  - D. a peculiar behavioral characteristic

5 According to paragraph 22, why would the dogs get into the garbage?

- A. They were poorly trained.
- B. They were left alone too often.
- C. They were responding to instinct.
- D. They were not given enough food.

6 According to the excerpt, what reputation did Julius and Stanley have in the author's neighborhood?

- A. They were considered nuisances.
- B. They were considered too inactive.
- C. They were considered to be ideal dogs.
- D. They were considered to be good guard dogs.

7 Read the sentence from paragraph 25 in the box below.

After some years—Stanley was seven and Julius eight—we moved almost like a school of fish, the three of us veering in one direction, then another.

What does the simile “like a school of fish” reveal about the author and his dogs?

- A. They had learned to vary their walks.
- B. They had become bored with each other.
- C. They had become easily distracted by things.
- D. They had developed an unspoken connection.

8 In paragraph 11, what does the term *forensically* suggest about how the dogs were sniffing?

- A. The dogs sniffed excitedly.
- B. The dogs sniffed thoroughly.
- C. The dogs sniffed very quickly.
- D. The dogs sniffed half-heartedly.

**Question 9 is an open-response question.**

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

**Write your answer to question 9 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.**

- 9** Describe how the author characterizes Julius and Stanley in the excerpt. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the excerpt.

Ogden Nash has a way of making clever observations about life. P. B. (Percy Bysshe) Shelley was a famous nineteenth-century English poet. Read the poem and answer the questions that follow.

### YOU AND ME AND P. B. SHELLEY

What is life? Life is stepping down a step or sitting in a  
 chair,  
 And it isn't there.  
 Life is not having been told that the man has just waxed  
 5 the floor,  
 It is pulling doors marked PUSH and pushing doors marked  
 PULL and not noticing notices which say PLEASE USE  
 OTHER DOOR.  
 Life is an Easter Parade  
 10 In which you whisper, "No darling if it's a boy we'll name  
 him after your father!" into the ear of an astonished  
 stranger because the lady you thought was walking  
 beside you has stopped to gaze into a window full of  
 radishes and hot malted lemonade.  
 15 It is when you diagnose a sore throat as an unprepared  
 geography lesson and send your child weeping to  
 school only to be returned an hour later covered with  
 spots that are indubitably genuine,  
 It is a concert with a trombone soloist filling in for Ye-  
 20 hudi Menuhin.\*  
 Were it not for frustration and humiliation  
 I suppose the human race would get ideas above its sta-  
 tion.  
 Somebody once described Shelley as a beautiful and inef-  
 25 fective angel beating his luminous wings against the  
 void in vain,  
 Which is certainly describing with might and main,  
  
 But probably means that we are all brothers under our  
 pelts,  
 30 And Shelley went around pulling doors marked PUSH and  
 pushing doors marked PULL just like everybody else.

—Ogden Nash

\* *Yehudi Menuhin* — a famous American violinist and conductor

- 10 In the poem, what does the poet use to define life?
- A. a popular fable
  - B. a dictionary definition
  - C. a quotation from another poem
  - D. a series of humorous comparisons
- 11 Which of the following phrases **best** summarizes the events described in lines 1–8?
- A. familiar nightmares
  - B. common practical jokes
  - C. life’s common frustrations
  - D. life’s dangerous experiences
- 12 Which of the following sentences **best** summarizes what is happening in lines 9–14?
- A. The speaker mistakenly speaks to a stranger.
  - B. The speaker asks a friend what to name his child.
  - C. The speaker ignores his wife and looks in a store window.
  - D. The speaker argues with his wife about naming their baby.
- 13 What is the speaker saying about Shelley in lines 24–31?
- A. Shelley was a better poet than most.
  - B. Shelley acted like an angel most of the time.
  - C. Shelley experienced many tragedies in his life.
  - D. Shelley experienced the same problems as everyone.
- 14 Which of the following definitions of *station* is used in lines 22–23?
- A. a social position or rank
  - B. a stopping place along a route
  - C. a place where one is assigned to stand
  - D. a place from which a service is provided

*The epic of Gilgamesh dates from 1700 BC but was only discovered in AD 1853, buried in the ruins of Nineveh, in present-day Iraq. Written on clay tablets, it relates the life and adventures of a famous king, Gilgamesh, and his best friend, Enkidu. Read the excerpt from Gilgamesh and answer the questions that follow.*

*from* GILGAMESH  
BOOK III

Students read a selection titled *Gilgamesh* and then answered questions 15 through 20 that follow on pages 182 and 183 of this document.

Due to copyright restrictions, the selection cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the copyright citation below.

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Due to copyright restrictions, the selection that appeared on this page cannot be released to the public over the Internet. For more information, see the citation on page 179.

- 15 Which of the following elements of an epic is established in stanza 1 of the excerpt?
- A. the hero's task
  - B. the story's moral
  - C. the gods' character
  - D. the hero's love interest
- 16 What is the **main** purpose of Gilgamesh's speech in stanza 6?
- A. to compare men with the gods
  - B. to describe Humbaba's childhood
  - C. to describe how dangerous the forest is
  - D. to persuade Enkidu to accompany him
- 17 In stanza 6, why is Gilgamesh unafraid of confronting Humbaba?
- A. He will be with Enkidu.
  - B. He will be protected by the gods.
  - C. He knows that Humbaba is cowardly.
  - D. He understands that all people must die.

- 18 In the excerpt, what does Gilgamesh **most** hope will result from killing Humbaba?
- A. glory for himself
  - B. safety for his people
  - C. the favor of the gods
  - D. the respect of his friend

- 19 Read stanza 12 of the excerpt in the box below.

Enkidu listened gravely. He stood silent there for a long time. At last he nodded. Gilgamesh took his hand.

- What is suggested by the stanza?
- A. The men are saying goodbye.
  - B. Enkidu will go with Gilgamesh.
  - C. Gilgamesh is frustrated with Enkidu.
  - D. The men agree with the elders' advice.

**Question 20 is an open-response question.**

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

**Write your answer to question 20 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.**

- 20** Describe the conflict between Gilgamesh and Enkidu in the excerpt. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the excerpt.

# English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 2

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains one reading selection with seven multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*In this excerpt, the narrator talks about a family memory. The Abenaki are American Indian people from New England and eastern Canada. Read the excerpt and answer the questions that follow.*

### CLIMBING THE LADDER

by Joseph Bruchac

- 1 As I look at that photograph and the smile on my grandfather's face, I think of the day I climbed the ladder. The story of me and the ladder is a tale both my grandfather and grandmother told me so often that I feel my memory of it is completely my own.
- 2 My grandfather was never afraid of heights. I've heard it said, and even read it in a place or two, that the Indian people of the Northeast are born without a fear of high places, that it is something genetic. I don't know if I believe that. It might be more that non-Indians are taught, as children, to be afraid of so many things that might hurt them—sharp objects, fire, high places, wild animals, the woods, strangers—that they grow up scared of everything. Do this and don't do that.
- 3 There was little of "do this and don't do that" in my grandfather's growing up, from what he told me. If he stuck his hand in the fire, that fire would burn him. No need for any adult to teach a kid that. If he climbed a tree and fell out, then he'd learn on his own that high places were dangerous. Neither his father nor his mother ever struck him—or even shouted at him.
- 4 . . . In the Abenaki way you learn better by doing than by being told. People are allowed to make their own mistakes. In the Abenaki way, you never strike a child, for fear that a blow might break their spirit. It might take away their self-respect, make them sad and fearful, and teach them that it is right for those who are big to bully those who are small.
- 5 The self-respect that was nurtured by his parents was so much a part of my grandfather's upbringing, he would never allow anyone to tell him what to do—unless he felt in his heart that it was right for him to do it. His mother died when he was thirteen and his father remarried—marrying his wife's widowed sister. My grandfather left his father's home shortly after that, never to return. I once asked him why.
- 6 "I didn't like her," he said, referring to his stepmother.
- 7 "Why not, Grampa?"
- 8 "She jes' yelled at me," he said. "I told my father, if he ever needed help, all he had to do was ask and I'd do it. But I wasn't a-going to stay under the same roof with her."
- 9 And that was it. That same year he left home and went off to work. He worked first at the store of Seneca Smith and then as a logger in the woods. He was on his own, but not afraid to be there. That was just how he was with heights too.

10 There was this thing my grandfather used to do every now and then, even when he was eighty years old. He called it “checking the peak.” He would go outside, look up at the roof of the house, and then declare, “I got to check the peak.” He’d take the wooden extension ladder and place it against the south side of the house. That house rises up three stories and more. When you stand on the peak you can see Saratoga Lake, ten miles to the south, and the hills of Vermont, thirty miles to the east. That was what my grandfather would do. He would climb that ladder and then make his way up the steep metal roof to stand on the very peak, to walk along it with easy, balanced steps, and then lean against the brick chimney and look out. Checking the peak.

11 The autumn day I remember, the day my grandparents lodged so firmly into my memory by telling and retelling the story, my grandfather decided to check the peak. It was October and I had just turned three. . . .

12 My face intent and serious, I followed my grandfather as he took out the ladder that day. I was quiet. I had already learned that it was easier to go unnoticed when one was quiet. When my parents lived in this house, it had usually been safest for me to be unnoticed. My grandfather set the base of the ladder firmly onto the ground and stomped on the bottom rung with his foot. He shook it to make sure it was steady, and then went up. Even though he was over sixty, he moved as quick as a cat up that ladder. I watched every step to see how he did it. He reached the top and then went up the silver-painted roof to stand on the peak and look out, shading his dark-browed eyes with his left hand. Then he heard a sound. It was a little voice saying “Aaah!”

13 He turned and looked down to see me at the very top of the ladder, swaying back and forth a bit and looking out. There was so much to see from up there! I was happy.

14 “Aaah,” I said again.

15 Another man might have yelled then or tried to grab me, but that was not my grandfather’s way. Instead, in his calm, soft voice he just said, “Well, I’ll be! Fergot my hammer. Got to go back down and get it. Sonny, you go first.”

16 I started down the ladder, but before I had gone more than a rung or two, my grandfather was there with me. He was climbing down the ladder with his hands a rung above me and his feet two rungs below me. I had heard my grandmother talking to him so often about how he was “getting on in years” and needed “to be more careful.” She was worried about him doing such things as climbing high ladders. I remembered that, and so I guessed that he must have wanted my help when he came down. I took it slow and was really careful.

17 But when we got to the bottom the strangest thing happened. Grampa forgot all about the hammer he’d needed. Instead, he just took that ladder, laid it down on the ground, and then sat there himself with one arm around me and one hand patting his chest. I put my hand on his shoulder to reassure him. I didn’t know what “getting on in years” was, but I figured that must have been the reason for him being so upset. Whatever it was, I hoped he would recover from it soon.

- 21 According to the narrator, what is the **main** effect of the “do this and don’t do that” method of parenting?
- A. It makes children afraid of too many things.
  - B. It makes children afraid of meeting new people.
  - C. It makes children afraid of heights.
  - D. It makes children afraid of their parents.
- 22 Based on the first sentence in paragraph 5, what word **best** describes the narrator’s grandfather?
- A. independent
  - B. rebellious
  - C. selfish
  - D. solitary
- 23 Which sentence from the excerpt **best** explains why the narrator reaches the top of the ladder without being seen?
- A. “My face intent and serious, I followed my grandfather as he took out the ladder that day.”
  - B. “I had already learned that it was easier to go unnoticed when one was quiet.”
  - C. “Even though he was over sixty, he moved as quick as a cat up that ladder.”
  - D. “I watched every step to see how he did it.”
- 24 Based on the excerpt, why does the boy say “Aaah” in paragraphs 12 and 14?
- A. He is trying to get his grandfather’s attention.
  - B. He is delighted at the view from the roof.
  - C. He is suddenly nervous about being up so high.
  - D. He is surprised by how much he likes the ladder.

- 25 Which of the following **best** describes the grandfather in paragraph 17?
- A. amused
  - B. annoyed
  - C. puzzled
  - D. relieved
- 26 Based on the excerpt, how does the narrator view his grandfather?
- A. with respect and admiration
  - B. with fear and distrust
  - C. with concern and pity
  - D. with shame and anger
- 27 What does the word *lodged* mean as it is used in the first sentence of paragraph 11?
- A. lost
  - B. stuck
  - C. haunted
  - D. imagined

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**Question 28 is an open-response question.**

- **Read the question carefully.**
- **Explain your answer.**
- **Add supporting details.**
- **Double-check your work.**

**Write your answer to question 28 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.**

- 28 In the excerpt, the narrator describes the Abenaki way of doing things. Explain how the events in the excerpt reflect the Abenaki way. Use relevant and specific information from the excerpt to support your answer.

# English Language Arts

## READING COMPREHENSION: SESSION 3

### DIRECTIONS

This session contains two reading selections with eleven multiple-choice questions and one open-response question. Mark your answers to these questions in the spaces provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

*Garbage workers in New York City have developed a fascinating vocabulary to describe their work. This article reveals the origins of such terms as “disco rice,” “mongo,” and other colorful expressions. Read the article and answer the questions that follow.*

# Disco Rice, and Other Trash Talk

## In New York, Picking Up the Garbage Means Picking Up the Lingo

by Ian Urbina

1 Trash stinks, and as the summer heats up and the rain casts a musty net over the air, it stinks more. So the garbage workers step into the spotlight. The summer is the sanitation workers’ moment to be heroes, like firefighters at a four-alarm or police officers at a murder scene. The garbage crews clear the air and make way for the next day’s mass consumption.

2 But listen closely. Safeguarding New York City from olfactory assault are its 6,200 sanitation workers. You may notice them in their sweaty haul from curb to truck, but understanding what they say is a different matter. That’s because the insular subculture of this thankless job requires a lingo almost as funky as the work itself.

3 The hopper is the back of the truck. Baling is when the truck compacts trash in its belly. Workers often refer to themselves as trash hounds or sanit men. Lazy workers walk backward. Speedy workers are called runners. The trucks are called white elephants, for their size, smell and expense. The amount of trash they consume is measured by indentations on the side, called ribs.

4 The slang has been created over generations, an argot so encompassing that it is actually the focus of academic study. It makes disgusting items not so disgusting. It honors retired supervisors. For no other reason than it is summer, and it is hot outside, and the garbage men are breaking their backs carting away the city’s smelly trash, here is a guide to this other language of New York.

5 “If an outsider steps into a sanitation garage in the city, there is a good chance he will have no clue what’s being said,” said Robin Nagle, an anthropology professor at New York University, who has studied the culture of sanitation since 1995. “It’s a fairly closed community.”

6 Some terms have crossed over into pop culture. Art exhibits around the country now feature “mongo,” New York sanitation slang for salvaged garbage. Other expressions are less than enticing. “Disco rice” refers to maggots. . . .

7 Perhaps it should come as no surprise that a vibrant lexicon has emerged from the oldest uniformed municipal sanitation force in the nation, handling more trash than any other, in a city known for its clever turn of phrase.

8 Much of the jargon comes from workplace tasks. Senior employees do “collections,” which means residential pickup at about \$35 extra per day. The fortunate who get the “tissue” do lighter duty, such as desk work. The luckiest “get Schranked,” named for Bob Schrank, a departmental official who in the 1980’s established the policy that a worker with collections seniority who does not get to ride the truck still earns higher pay for tasks like desk work and “running the baskets.”

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**In the sanitation  
business, slang is passed  
down through the years.**

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9 Newcomers usually “run the baskets,” emptying city trash cans on street corners. Worse still is the job of draining “hopper juice,” the dreaded bile that collects in the belly of the beast.

10 “Swinging a load” is when corrupt crews weigh down their truck with leftover trash from the previous day or hidden objects like cinder blocks or roof-welded steel plates to trick the scales and get credit for a larger haul.

11 The reason for the proliferation of sanitation slang remains unclear. “The irony is that the very stigma that makes these workers invisible is what gives rise to their gallows humor and the wit of their overall culture,” said Mierle Laderman Ukeles, who has been the artist in residence for the city’s Department of Sanitation since 1977. “People isolated on the fringe always create their own mores and their own lingo.”

12 Grant Barrett, project director for the Historical Dictionary of American Slang, the third volume of which will be published by Oxford University Press in early 2006, offered a similar explanation. “Much of professional jargon is tongue in cheek,” he said, explaining that it lends levity to the drudgery of daily labor.

13 Sanitation policymakers also contribute to the catchy argot, as with “nimby,” or not in my back yard. Carmen J. Cognetta, counsel to the City Council’s sanitation and solid waste committee, said that “nimby used to be the key term in the department.”

14 “But now,” he added, “the Sanitation Department describes the mood as ‘banana,’ which means ‘build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone.’ And sometimes they say things in the city are verging on ‘nope,’ which is ‘not on planet earth.’”

15 The existence of sanitation jargon is not new. Mr. Barrett of Oxford University Press said some terms originated in the 1940’s and 50’s. A few examples: honey boat: a garbage scow or barge (1941); g-man: garbage man, soldier handling garbage duties, usually associated with the military (1941); airmail: trash thrown from high windows (1952).

16 But Frank O’Keefe, who has been with the department nearly two decades, is quick to point out that workers — not administrators — produce the best material.

17 “For administrators, we don’t pick up trash, we collect it,” Mr. O’Keefe said. “We don’t dump it in Jersey, we export it. There’s never a pile on the corner of Fifth Avenue, there’s a situation on Fifth Avenue. The guys on the back of the truck are the ones who know what they’re doing and who have the knack.”

18 Ms. Ukeles pointed out that aside from handling snow removal, the sanitation workers haul about 11,000 tons of garbage a day. “The workers hold two things in common: the language of their trade and the sense of being taken for granted,” she said.

19 This self-perception may explain sanitation workers comparing themselves with the city’s police officers and firefighters. “Sanitation workers always say you can go your whole life without ever needing a firefighter,” Ms. Nagle, the anthropology professor, said. “If you’re lucky, the same goes for calling the cops. But you need sanitation workers every single day.”

20 Official mottos from each department echo others. “New York’s finest” refers to the city’s police. The firefighters are “New York’s bravest.” The sanitation force goes by “New York’s strongest.”

21 While admitting that their job does not require facing off with knife-wielding criminals or racing into burning buildings, sanitation workers are quick to point out that their profession is consistently ranked among

the top 10 most dangerous jobs, according to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics. The danger, Ms. Nagle said, comes mostly from car swipes, machinery injuries, rat bites and debris flying from the hopper.

22 “We’ve got a saying when people take us for granted,” said Ronnie Cohen, a worker from Manhattan. “We just tell them that we can deliver instead if that’s their preference.”

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- 29 In paragraph 1, what does the author’s comparison of garbage crews to firefighters and police officers suggest?
- A. that garbage workers should be paid more
  - B. that garbage workers have dangerous jobs
  - C. that garbage workers are important to the city
  - D. that garbage workers often move on to other jobs

- 30 In paragraph 3, how does the author establish the focus of the article?
- A. He explains how garbage is collected.
  - B. He compares garbage collection to other work.
  - C. He introduces technical details about garbage trucks.
  - D. He gives examples of language used by garbage workers.

- 31 According to paragraph 4, what is one of the **main** reasons that garbage workers' slang has evolved over the years?
- A. It has been studied by language experts.
  - B. It makes an unpleasant job more tolerable.
  - C. It describes a highly technical field of work.
  - D. It helps garbage workers to communicate effectively.

- 32 Read the sentence from paragraph 9 in the box below.

Worse still is the job of draining "hopper juice," the dreaded bile that collects in the belly of the beast.

- In the sentence, why does the author describe "hopper juice" as "the dreaded bile"?
- A. to explain why draining hopper juice is difficult to do
  - B. to emphasize the unpleasantness of draining hopper juice
  - C. to exaggerate the effort involved in draining hopper juice
  - D. to compare draining hopper juice to a medical emergency

- 33 Which of the following can **most reasonably** be concluded from paragraph 10?
- A. Sanitation trucks are difficult to load.
  - B. Many sanitation workers are dishonest.
  - C. Sanitation truck earnings are based on weight.
  - D. Sanitation workers sometimes haul unusual objects.

- 34 Based on the article, how do sanitation workers feel they are viewed by the general public?
- A. as doing a dangerous job
  - B. as often acting dishonestly
  - C. as less valued than other city workers
  - D. as similar to firefighters and the police

- 35 Read the text from paragraph 7 in the box below.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that a vibrant lexicon has emerged . . .

- Which of the following phrases is **closest** in meaning to *vibrant lexicon*?
- A. vivid detail
  - B. official motto
  - C. lively vocabulary
  - D. odd pronunciation

Question 36 is an open-response question.

- Read the question carefully.
- Explain your answer.
- Add supporting details.
- Double-check your work.

Write your answer to question 36 in the space provided in your Student Answer Booklet.

- 36 Based on the article, explain the reasons why sanitation workers have developed their own slang. Support your answer with relevant and specific information from the article.

*In this essay, the author recalls how the arrival of electricity to his grandmother's small farm community allowed her family to enjoy her prized corn all year long. Discover how his grandmother's dedication to her work affects the author to this day. Read the essay and answer the questions that follow.*

## SWEET CORN

by Tony Earley

Students read a selection titled "Sweet Corn" and then answered questions 37 through 40 that follow on page 195 of this document.

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- 37 How does the author develop paragraph 1 of the essay?
- A. He compares the past to the present.
  - B. He describes his reasons for writing the essay.
  - C. He begins with a problem and shows the solution.
  - D. He begins with background and narrows to a focus.

- 38 Read the sentence from paragraph 3 in the box below.

You can mimic the motions that she used to conjure up her masterpiece, but not the results.

Based on the sentence, in what way was Granny's corn **most** like a work of art?

- A. It was beautiful to look at.
- B. It was impossible to duplicate.
- C. It was made according to a rigid plan.
- D. It was intended to make people happy.

- 39 Based on paragraph 5, what does the author suggest about his grandmother's seventy years of farm life?
- A. It was a relaxing life.
  - B. It was a fulfilling life.
  - C. It was an isolated life.
  - D. It was a thankless life.

- 40 Reread the last sentence of the essay. What point does the author make about Granny in the sentence?
- A. Granny's hard work was rarely appreciated by her family.
  - B. Granny always resented the demands her family put on her.
  - C. Granny made the corn primarily because she loved to work.
  - D. Granny's love for her family was shown through her efforts.

**Grade 8 English Language Arts  
Reading Comprehension  
Spring 2007 Released Items:  
Reporting Categories, Standards, and Correct Answers**

Item No.	Page No.	Reporting Category	Standard	Correct Answer (MC)*
1	174	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	C
2	174	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
3	174	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
4	174	<i>Language</i>	4	D
5	175	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
6	175	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	C
7	175	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	D
8	175	<i>Language</i>	4	B
9	176	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	
10	178	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14	D
11	178	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14	C
12	178	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14	A
13	178	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	14	D
14	178	<i>Language</i>	4	A
15	182	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	A
16	182	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	D
17	182	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	D
18	182	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	A
19	182	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	B
20	183	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	16	
21	186	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
22	186	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
23	186	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	B
24	186	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	B
25	187	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	D
26	187	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	A
27	187	<i>Language</i>	4	B
28	187	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	12	
29	190	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
30	190	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
31	191	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	B
32	191	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	B
33	191	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
34	191	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	C
35	191	<i>Language</i>	4	C
36	192	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	
37	195	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	13	D
38	195	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	15	B
39	195	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	B
40	195	<i>Reading and Literature</i>	8	D

\* Answers are provided here for multiple-choice items only. Sample responses and scoring guidelines for open-response items, which are indicated by shaded cells, will be posted to the Department's Web site later this year.